

**27th Sunday of Ordinary Time (Cycle B) Homily**  
**Saint William, Champion | October 3, 2021**  
**Gn 2:18-24 | Heb 2:9-11 | Mk 10:2-12**  
**Deacon Robert Mintus**

A number of years ago, I received a surprise in the mail. It was a wedding invitation for a friend who I'd known for a number of years, and was probably one of the last people I would ever expect to be married. But I'm happy to report that everything happened as planned, and he found happiness. In fact, our kids went to swimming classes together.

I thought of him as I wrote my homily because as our first reading reminds us, God created people for relationships. Human society is based on those relationships. We spend a lot of time and energy in cultivating and maintaining those relationships. They can be not only the source of great joy when they are going well but as we all know and unfortunately have seen from time to time, they can also a source of heartache when they are not.

Today, the Pharisees attempt to become a source of heartache when posing a question about what we might call "Family Values" to Jesus – "Is it lawful for a husband to divorce his wife?" It was another potential trap question. On one hand, answering "No" would have brought Jesus into a potential conflict with the Mosaic law. Some scholars have suggested that this question may have

been asked in attempt to get Jesus to go “on the record” shortly after the death of John the Baptist, when Herod had remarried. A “No” answer would have gone back to Herod, who could have had Jesus arrested and jailed for challenging him. And on the other hand, if Jesus should answer “Yes”, the Pharisees could claim that Jesus was not upholding the sanctity and importance of marriage – that he didn’t believe in “Family Values”.

The answer Jesus gave caught the Pharisees off-guard. He asked them to quote the law, and when they did so, He demonstrated that he not only understood the law, but also the underlying issues. He also affirmed the importance and value of marriage with his answer. Jesus pointed out to the Pharisees what God had created marriage to be. Then he challenged the Pharisees by saying, “what God has joined together, no human being must separate.” This teaching was heard by his disciples, and they questioned him once more in private. In that day, it was possible for a man to divorce his wife, pretty much for any reason. Note that this was NOT an option for the wife. Jesus condemned the practice, saying that anyone who divorces their spouse and marries another commits adultery and likewise forces their ex-wife to do the same. Jesus left no questions about where he stood.

PAUSE - We live in a society in which few people are untouched by failed marriages. Statistically speaking, nearly half of all marriages today which start out as a source of joy become a source of heartache and end in divorce. So even if we are not divorced, chances are likely that we know someone else who is.

On the other hand, we can see some shining examples of people who are still very much in love with each other and faithful to each other after 20, 30, 40, 50, 60 or even 70 years. They seem to be living out the ideals that Jesus speaks of. But the reality of it all is that successful marriages aren't a matter of meeting that perfect person, that Mr. Right or Mrs. Right, and everything magically falling into place. It's a matter of both husband and wife living out the promises they made on their wedding day, one day at a time, with the help of family, friends, and the grace of God. A successful marriage is based on forgiveness, patience, and sacrifice, all flowing out of love.

These days, couples have to balance many competing demands – work, children, parents, church, and community. With the fast pace and high stress levels of life today, it is easy to understand why many people struggle at marriage and why some marriages fail. While God designed man and women for

marriage, we bring our own human frailties into this relationship. Some people are too immature, too focused on their careers or hobbies, or simply too undisciplined to make marriage work. Maybe we get married for the wrong reasons, or maybe we have unrealistic expectations of what marriage is about. We fall short of God's plan. And while the Church considers separation and divorce as a last resort, sometimes it is necessary, especially when there is serious risk of harm to a spouse or the children.

How do we deal with that reality? How do we treat the couple that we used to go to dinner with now that they've divorced? Divorce is really the death of a relationship. Can we be there to support them in their loss? Or do we stay away, not wanting to get our hands dirty? Do we treat them or their ex with criticism and shame, or with the compassion and forgiveness of Jesus? When Jesus met the woman at the well, she had been married seven times, and was living with a man who was not her husband, and yet rather than condemning her, he forgave her and changed her life forever.

In fact, St. Paul writes about the marriage relationship between Jesus Christ and the Church in his letter to the Ephesians. There he references the passage in our first reading about two becoming one flesh – and then he adds, “This is a

great mystery, but I speak in reference to Christ and the Church.” Through this new marriage covenant, there is hope and good news for all of us.

This week, perhaps we could reflect on God’s gift of marriage in our lives. Let us thank him for this gift, and also pray for those who preparing to be married, all those who are married - especially those who are in marriages that are in need of healing – and those who mourn the loss of their spouse. May our prayers strengthen them and turn any heartache they may be experiencing into a source of joy.